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FOR PUBLIC AFFAIRS STAFF

PROGRAM The MacNeil/Lehrer NewsHour

STATION WETA-TV
PBS Network

DATE May 13, 1985 7:00 P.M.

CITY Washington, D.C.

SUBJECT Terrorism

CHARLAYNE HUNTER-GAULT: Our lead focus segment tonight looks at terrorism, how the United States responds to terrorist threats and what kind of involvement does and should the U.S. Government have with pro-Western terrorist organizations. These issues are in the news today following that CIA denial of involvement in training Lebanese terrorists.

The ranking Democrat on the Senate Intelligence Committee, Patrick Leahy of Vermont, said he would launch his own investigation of the CIA terrorist allegations. Senator Leahy is with us now.

Senator, do you accept the CIA's denial that it didn't have anything to do with training those terrorists in Lebanon?

SENATOR PATRICK LEAHY: Well, I think that only the CIA can speak for themselves on that. I'm not -- I'm somewhat restrained, as Vice Chairman of the Senate Intelligence Committee, to go into discussions of classified matters. I think that one mistake that might be made is if we spend all our time going back and forth saying who did this, at what time, and so on. I think we ought to look at what we have today, what we're doing in the future.

HUNTER-GAULT: Well, let me just ask you this. As far as you know, was such a plan ever approved by the White House?

SENATOR LEAHY: Well, that, again -- it's a difficult question to ask me because I'd have to go into classified material, which I'm not at liberty to do. Only the White House can discuss that.

My concern is what we do with terrorism. I've been pushing for a couple of years now, and will continue to, with the CIA and others to get their act together, to get it far better coordinated.

Terrorism is one of the things that -- well, it actually is the biggest ongoing threat, short the obvious one of nuclear war, that faces the United States. And here we are the most powerful nation in the world and we can't react to it.

HUNTER-GAULT: Well, you said you were going to launch your own investigation into this particular incident. That was sparked by the newspaper reports and so on?

SENATOR LEAHY: Yes. I have a series of ongoing things that I do in, again, my capacity as Vice Chairman of the Intelligence Committee regarding the CIA. This and a number of others are things that I will be looking at. But they'll be looking at it primarily to see what we're going to do be doing in the future.

I think Senator Durenberger and I agree very much on one issue. You can spend all your time putting out fires, you can spend a great deal of your time preventing fires. I'd rather prevent them. And the fire to prevent, of course, is the one of terrorism.

We're not adequately equipped to deal with it. And yet the danger is increasing continuously.

HUNTER-GAULT: Well, what's inadequate? I mean what are you going to be looking into in this investigation? And why are you launching it?

SENATOR LEAHY: Well, the United States, if they're going to deal with terrorists, they're not going to do it by negotiating or soft words or asking them to please stop. You're going to do it with force. That means either preventive force or, if you can't locate them before a terrorist act, going after them afterward, tracking them down and getting rid of them once and for all. And to do that, you've got to have far better intelligence than we presently have.

That's the most difficult thing we face today. If the President wishes to take action against a terrorist group, either preventively or after the fact, the biggest thing that's hampered him, and certainly has in the past ten years, the time I've been in the Senate, is having adequate enough information of exactly who to go after.

HUNTER-GAULT: Do you think that -- I know you don't

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want to spend too much time talking about this particular incident. But does this underscore any of the problems that you have with all of the...

SENATOR LEAHY: Take the article in the paper. Assuming that some aspects of it are so, assuming that -- well, or just take a hypothetical. Assuming that we have to go and use surrogates to do our work. Then we run into a very grave problem. One is certainly the problem of control. The other is surrogates often times tend to go on their own agenda rather than our own.

Now, there may be instances where that is the only way, that is the only way you can act. But my concern is that our options are limited by the degree and extent of the intelligence that we have. And it is a very, very difficult thing to get intelligence in this area, of course.

HUNTER-GAULT: Why do you think it's so limited?

SENATOR LEAHY: Well, in knowing exactly who you go after. We can, you know, make Fortress America both here in the United States and abroad and completely block off all public buildings and everything else. But that's not the way the United States operates. We're limited because we're usually dealing with small groups that act often in what appears to us, at least, to be an irrational fashion.

But the FBI deals with this question a great deal in the United States. We have to have our agencies, especially our intelligence agencies, able to deal with it abroad. Otherwise you're going to have small groups of terrorists determine our foreign policy, determine our defense policy, and actually in some instances determine even where we may be able to go as Americans in the world. I can't accept that.

HUNTER-GAULT: Do you feel that in protecting U.S. citizens who may be threatened abroad, the U.S. should use its own people? Or would you approve of using surrogates?

SENATOR LEAHY: I think to the extent that we can use our own people, we should use our own people. Because there we do have control, there we do know what we're doing.

There may well be instances where there's no other way than to use somebody else. But that should be very much the exception, not the rule.

HUNTER-GAULT: And you're not troubled at all by the U.S. prohibition against assassination in launching these preemptive strikes?

SENATOR LEAHY: Well, I think that we know what assassination is. That prohibition came in after the attempts on Castro's life and so on. We're talking about a different thing. That can -- we can keep that prohibition and we could operate within it. I'm talking about the right of self-defense. And it would certainly have been self-defense to stop the terrorists who murdered the 250 Marines in Beirut. That's a big difference between self-defense and assassination. And I think every member of the Intelligence Committee understands the difference. I think most Americans understand the difference. And certainly the CIA understands the difference.

HUNTER-GAULT: All right, Senator Leahy. Thank you.

JIM LEHRER: Should the fire of terrorism be fought with the fire of other terrorism? is, as the Senator said, only one of several questions raised by the Lebanon story, as well as other recent terrorist events.

Here to disagree about them are two experienced experts: Robert Kupperman, a consultant on terrorism to both the State and Defense Departments. He is Director of Science and Technology Programs at the Georgetown University Center for Strategic and International Studies. And Ray Cline, former Deputy Director of the CIA and Director of the State Department's Bureau of Intelligence and Research. He too is now associated with the Georgetown Center.

Mr. Kupperman, is surrogates the way to go?

ROBERT KUPPERMAN: You know, I think it's a question of opportunity. I'd like to be able to use our own internal forces as much as we can.

LEHRER: What are our internal forces?

KUPPERMAN: Well, this means everything from military special operations units to intelligence agencies.

I think that the issue is span of control, the issue is reliability. If we're going to justify an action taken in self-defense, we don't want to appear as terrorists ourselves.

LEHRER: If this Lebanon story is correct as written -- I'm not suggesting that it is. The CIA says it isn't. But if that kind -- or to use, as the Senator was saying, use a hypothetical that is identical to the Lebanon story, is that a legitimate use of surrogates?

KUPPERMAN: A very simple matter. We end up with 80 dead, some 200 maimed. It seems to me, to get one fellow, no

matter how bad, that seems rather excessive.

LEHRER: Mr. Cline, your view of this.

RAY CLINE: My view is limited by the fact that I think the problem is not the way the Washington Post described it, nor even the way Bob and the Senator are describing it.

The CIA's job, as the Senator correctly said, is to get the intelligence on who the terrorists are and where they are. They have to use foreign people to do that because foreigners can only possibly penetrate these foreign operator cells.

I am absolutely convinced -- I have no classified information -- the CIA did not initiate an operation of this kind. So we're talking about a hypothetical case that is not characteristic of the performance of our own intelligence services.

LEHRER: But they have to deal with those kind of people. Is that what you're saying?

CLINE: We must -- they have to deal with them to get the intelligence, to get the information, to find out how to deal with the problem.

Now, when you get the information, the policy decision on what to do is not a CIA decision. That's a White House decision. And it would be reported to the Senate and House Intelligence Committees.

I am sure that when the Senator gets all the data together he'll find that they were in touch with these people for other reasons. They did not initiate and they've said they didn't train those operations.

LEHRER: Where do you draw the line, Mr. Kupperman? You deal with a terrorist and you want to get information. The only place you're going to get information about that terrorist group is from within the terrorist organization itself. And then those people go out and kill 80 people and maim 200.

KUPPERMAN: Let me say that, first of all, I agree you ought to use virtually means you can to penetrate the organization. That's not what I'm talking -- that's not the distinction that we're talking about.

If you decide to use force, covertly or overtly, I would prefer, if we're going to be using special operations teams, to use those that are highly reliable, that are well-trained, that we can virtually guaranty. That's given that we've penetrated the organizations.

Let's also understand something else. Suppose it were Iran. We go in and we blow away some training camp with, say, F-18s or whatever.

LEHRER: Training camps, say, for terrorists.

KUPPERMAN: Terrorists in Iran. We're not going to just kill male adult terrorists. There are going to be charred children there as well. And you people and ABC and CBS, et cetera, are going to be filming it. We're going to have a problem that we may have even gotten the wrong terrorists. And we may find that the infrastructure for terrorism here in the U.S., which has really not been seriously employed to date, may suddenly come alive and we're going to have a problem of interdiction, to put it mildly.

LEHRER: Mr. Cline, Senator Leahy just said that the American people understand the difference between assassination and a preventative strike. In other words, killing somebody before he or she may kill you. Do you think so?

CLINE: I think so. I think many people in Washington have a little difficulty with this distinction, but that's because...

LEHRER: What is the distinction?

CLINE: I think the Senator put it correctly. Prevention of terrorism, which is quite often directed against the lives of American diplomats, soldiers, has killed many of them in recent years, is self-defense. Self-defense is justified by the United Nations, by every tribunal in the world.

Now, to deter such actions in the face of a threat is a legitimate activity. It's just like a policeman trying to apprehend a criminal. He doesn't go out to kill him. But if necessary in trying to deal with him, he will kill him, and he will be right to do so.

There are very careful concepts of how to control such operations. The CIA abroad would follow them. I'm sure -- I agree with Bob. If you had a set-piece operation against foreign terrorists, you would probably want to use military personnel, special hit teams, which we have. But that's no assassination.

What I think you have to start with is the fact that we are confronting an undeclared secret or covert warfare against the American presence abroad. We have to fight back. It's a quasi-military operation.

LEHRER: We'll bring you into this too, Senator.

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The Washington Post story Sunday -- those viewers who did not see Sunday's Washington Post, it was a big banner story, clear across the top of the page. Again on page one again today quoting you, Senator, that you're going to follow up on it. The implication by that kind of play is that this is an awful thing that the CIA did.

Is that true, if it in fact did it, Mr. Kupperman?

KUPPERMAN: I don't think the CIA did it, and I think it's a misleading question.

CLINE: Good. I'm glad you said that.

KUPPERMAN: Number one, whether or not there were actions taken early on that brought groups together for penetration purposes over which we lost control doesn't mean we lose culpability. But it does mean that we have a command and control problem. It does mean that we have to understand the clandestine, growing, tremendously pernicious, insidious nature of terrorism. And our own perception of our own civil liberties rests with how we handle it.

LEHRER: Is that kind of thing a risk that you have to take, Senator, if you're going to...

SENATOR LEAHY: One thing I should make very clear, if indeed the CIA were to send out somebody with a car bomb to blow up 80 people and maim the others, [unintelligible] could be made known. And the Senate Intelligence Committee would. I don't expect to see that as being something that we're going to find, at all.

What my concern is is just what we are doing to -- and what I'm looking at, what are we doing when we combat terrorism, and to what extent might we use surrogates anywhere, whether it's the Middle East or anywhere else.

I much prefer, no matter what it costs, no matter what we have to do to beef up our people, that we be in a position where, to the greatest extent possible, we can use our own forces to combat terrorism, because of the control and because it's our agenda and not some other country's agenda.

LEHRER: Now, I may have missed it, gentlemen, and one of the three of you, or all three of you, probably will know it, and I'm not aware of it if it's happened, is where we have in fact used our own people in any kind of preemptive strike against terrorism.

CLINE: We haven't done that. This is the problem.

This country is not yet conceptually prepared to deal with this kind of threat in a forthright way.

LEHRER: Are the people being trained?

[Confusion of voices]

CLINE: It's a cheap way to fight a war and it's being fought against us, and we're losing.

SENATOR LEAHY: Both Mr. Kupperman and Mr. Cline are right. You see, that is the problem. It just goes on. We talk tough. I mean we say we're going after these terrorists, we're going to strike these terrorists, as though this should be a debate in the United States if you're for or against terrorists. I mean no American is for terrorists blowing up American soldiers, diplomats, and so on.

The thing is, terrorists are not deterred by words. Terrorists are only deterred by those actions that stop them. And I don't think that we are at a point where we are in a position to adequately stop them. And I think that the terrorist threat is growing and it's one that's going to be exported to this country if we don't find ways of stopping it.

LEHRER: Are we -- I'm not asking any of you to reveal any classified information, but are we in fact training counter-terrorists now? There are people who are employed by -- Americans employed by the United States Government who are back in some bush in West Virginia somewhere learning how to combat terrorism?

CLINE: The military services.

KUPPERMAN: It's not secret. There's nothing secret about that.

LEHRER: But why aren't they being used, Senator?

SENATOR LEAHY: Well, that is the intelligence question. We have the people. We have the finest-trained counter-terrorist people in the world.

[Confusion of voices]

SENATOR LEAHY: We don't bring them down in the Veteran Day parades. But the thing is, they're only used if our intelligence can say, "Here. Here is the place to go. Here is a target," and so on. And that's where the lack is.

We've got the people. They're the finest-trained people

that I've ever seen. And I've seen them in action. But we have to be able to say, "There is the place to go." And that's the Achilles' heel, if there is one.

KUPPERMAN: I think it's even deeper. Honestly, Senator, I think the military teams are fantastic on their own. I think the command structure that goes right up to the White House, which has an intervening layer of God knows how many colonels, generals, admirals, etcetera, wants to refight World War II. And to deal with any of these operations -- look, if you go on the NATO battlefield and a company-sized operation screws up, so what? I mean it's individually tragic. But a company-sized operation screws up in Desert One, the presidency is lost.

The political implications of messing up in this are so great...

LEHRER: You're talking about the Iran rescue.

KUPPERMAN: But any of these major terrorist events. The big thing that scares us half the time is the commitment of force when we might lose and we cannot justify what we're doing.

LEHRER: Well, that was the point I was raising about just the large play of the story Sunday...

CLINE: That's right. And the play was ridiculous. It was negative from the beginning. And I don't like to bash the media because that's a common game in Washington. But this was typical of the way the phrase CIA causes a reaction in our media, to assume there is a scandal and an abuse. Whereas, in fact, I am absolutely sure this editor will find out there was none.

LEHRER: But the Senator -- what you're saying, these are things that must be looked at. They must not -- you cannot assume that the CIA is necessarily wrong -- right in this particular case. Right?

[Confusion of voices]

SENATOR LEAHY: I agree with that. If you don't look at them, then there's no reason to have the Senate Intelligence Committee. It is there for an oversight. It is there as a check and balance. But I would hate to think that we spend -- I think that we can answer whatever questions we have very, very quickly. But we ought to be looking at the far more important question: What are we capable of doing today? What are we capable of doing tomorrow and the next day? Because every one of those three days the threat of terrorism is increasing.

KUPPERMAN: They're also getting more sophisticated,

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technically. And let's stop kidding ourselves. We're not dealing just with fellows with little Molotov cocktails. We're dealing with six-ton bombs which take engineering talent to put together.

CLINE: And we're dealing with state sponsors, sovereign governments that are organizing this terrorism...

SENATOR LEAHY: At what point, at what point are the stakes not the terrible stakes of a car bomb alongside our embassy, but the terrible stakes of a terrorist group with a nuclear weapon? And that is not an impossible thing.

LEHRER: That's the question I think we'll leave it at, Senator, Mr. Cline, and Mr. Kupperman.